



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING  
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW  
WASHINGTON, DC 20004

VINCENT C. GRAY  
CHAIRMAN  
The Honorable Arne Duncan  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20202

January 13, 2010

Dear Secretary Duncan,

I am delighted to express my support for the award of Race to the Top Funds to the District of Columbia. The District is unique among jurisdictions throughout the nation, and the award will undoubtedly enhance the potential impact and provide added value to federal investments in the city's school reform efforts.

The first of these unique characteristics is the healthy competition that results from dual public school systems. The District of Columbia has 58 separate local education agencies (LEAs), with only one traditional public school system. The remaining 57 LEAs represent a robust, innovative and increasingly successful public charter school system, with 57 schools on 99 campuses, each with enrollment open to students throughout the city. Creative strategies and instructional models, real opportunities for parental involvement and significant progress among many in minimizing persistent achievement gaps have increased the attraction of public charter schools, sparked exponential growth in enrollment and created a demand for similar innovation within the traditional school system.

Second, the District's relatively small size and centralized bureaucracy allow for expeditious implementation and a more immediate impact on educational reforms. As you know, the city's traditional public school system is governed by a Chancellor that reports directly to the Mayor, and each public charter school is autonomous with regard to operations and instructional strategy. As such, both governance approaches possess the independence to institute bold reforms in each of the four areas targeted by the Race to the Top Fund without a need for state or local school board approval. In addition, our combined school system population of only 74,000 students allows more funding per pupil than similar investments in states with larger student populations, and further enhances the overall impact of investments at the school and student level.

Finally, the District of Columbia benefits from an actively engaged legislative body, which I chair, that understands the critical nature of education reform; it shares the Department of Education's sense of urgency, and has committed its full support. One of my first actions as Chairman was to move oversight of education to the Committee of the Whole, in recognition of this issue's importance to every member of the Council. Since then, this Council has streamlined the educational governance structure, invested unprecedented amounts of local resources in public education and school facilities modernization, and broadened the scope of education reform through landmark legislation the Council adopted ensuring high-quality public education for every child in the District of Columbia beginning at age three.

These unique circumstances make the District of Columbia fertile ground for aggressive reforms in public education. The entire District government stands prepared to support this effort. With Race to the Top funds to leverage existing resources, there is no doubt we will succeed. On behalf of the Council, I urge your support in approving the District's application.



Sincerely,

Vincent C. Gray

